**1920s Wiki Assignment** (thanks hippocampus!)

**Overview:** For this assignment you will be assigned one of the following reading passages, which (as a collective) do a solid job of summarizing/describing the 1920s. You will identify specific kinds of information from your reading (see below) and post that information to our class wiki. (25 points)

**Categories:**

A. Red Scare D. Prohibition G. New Culture Part III J. Warren G. Harding – Part II

B. Nativism and Racism E. New Culture – Part I H. America’s Economy Roars K. Calvin Coolidge

C. Religion F. New Culture – Part II I. Warren G. Harding – Part I L. Herbert Hoover

**What to Find:** You must find/identify the following information from your reading – and post it to the Wiki.

1. Summary Statement: Summarize the entire reading passage in one complete sentence.

2. Supporting Ideas: Identify 3-5 supporting ideas from the reading passage. These should be stated in 3-5 complete sentences and be more specific than your Summary Statement.

3. Key Terms: Identify (and clearly define/describe) the 6-10 most important key terms (people, laws, events, etc.) from the reading passage.

* The above information must be posted to the wiki (bhartleynhs.wikispaces.com) by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Additionally, a hard copy of your information must be handed in on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* Extra Credit Points may be awarded to those “Categories” whose work is deemed to be best (i.e. most complete, descriptive, accurate/clear with Summary Statement, Supporting Ideas, and Key Terms.

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**Red Scare**

As World War I was raging in Europe, a political and social revolution defined by a struggle between the labor class and capitalists was taking place in Russia. In early 1917, the Bolshevik Party, headed by Vladimir Lenin, felt that the social climate in Russia was beginning to change in their favor. Outlining his plan for a communist revolution, Lenin wrote his “April Thesis” to demonstrate the Bolshevik vision for a Soviet State. By the end of October 1917, the Bolshevik Party, soon to be renamed the Communist Party, had control of the Russian government. In March 1918, Russia officially withdrew from the “capitalistic” world war.

In the United States, a small handful of individuals took notice of the promise of the new Russian government and formed their own communist party. At first, there was little reaction to this nascent political movement, since at the time the American public’s attention was focused on events in and around Germany. It did not take long after the war, however, for America’s attention to shift to a new target.

Just as the Russian communists had appointed themselves the “champions of the workers,” the tiny U.S. contingent of communists had also taken up the workers’ cause. They were quick to align with the pressing union issues, especially labor strikes brought about by high post-war prices. This alignment unsettled an American public already annoyed with a wave of strikes. In the minds of many, unionized labor became synonymous with communism.

The first notable strike occurred in February 1919, when Seattle was brought to a virtual standstill. Although the Seattle strike was considered orderly and the demands made by those on strike deemed humble, the fact that pro-communists helped organize the walkout raised a number of concerns among conservatives. The mayor of Seattle eventually called for federal troops to curb “the anarchy of Russia.” Another round of strikes starting in September 1919, organized by the radical William Foster, resulted in approximately 340,000 steelworkers, factory workers, and dockworkers declaring a strike, which continued to heighten popular suspicion.

Apart from the strikes taking place, in April of 1919 the United States Postal Service intercepted almost 40 mail bombs addressed to such prominent figures as John D. Rockefeller and Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. In June 1919 a bomb that slipped through the postal screening exploded at the home of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. No one was injured in the blast, but Palmer’s home was damaged and anarchist pamphlets were strewn up and down his Washington D.C. street. Even though these extreme tactics were the work of a handful of anarchist, few people saw the difference between anarchy and communism. The “red scare” of 1919-1920 had officially begun.

Palmer wasted no time in forming the General Intelligence Division within the Department of Justice to gather information about radical individuals behind the perceived communist insurgence. The new division was headed by J. Edgar Hoover, who declared their intention to begin deporting radicals.

On November 7, 1919, federal agents in 12 cities raided the meeting places of the Union of Russian Workers. Over 650 people were arrested, many who did not have a connection to the union. On December 22, 249 people suspected of anarchy and criminal activity were deported to Russia without the benefit of any judicial process on a ship nicknamed the “Soviet Ark.” The evidence to deport existed for only 43 of the individuals.

The public approved of what came to be known as the “Palmer Raids” and deportation, and Palmer was well aware of the support. His personal ambition was to seek the 1920 Democratic presidential nomination, so he aimed to give the public more of what it wanted. Starting on January 2, 1920, Palmer began enforcing over 3,000 arrest warrants, and police in 33 cities took about 6,000 suspected communist into custody. Some of those arrested where held for weeks at a time without the right to communicate with a lawyer or their family, while authorities attempted to gather evidence against them. In some cases when visitors were allowed to meet with suspects, the visitors themselves were arrested under the pretense that they must be communists since they were visiting a suspected communist.

Eventually, public opinion started to turn against Palmer’s crusade as people began to question the constitutionality of the raids led by Palmer. Palmer attempted to regain public support by warning of a massive terrorist protest around the country on May 1, 1920. Many cities braced for the worst and federal troops were placed on standby, but not one demonstration took place that day. By the summer of 1920, many saw Palmer as more of a threat to American civil liberties than a handful of radicals.

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**Nativism and Racism**

Beginning in 1920, immigration into the United States once again increased dramatically. Approximately 110,000 people immigrated to the U.S. in 1919, and that number increased to more than 430,000 in 1920 and more than 800,000 in 1921. And as before, many native-born Americans saw the immigrants as a threat to their livelihood and their image of America. Congress, reacting to this widespread sentiment, passed the Emergency Quota Act of 1921.

Under this act, a new quota system would stem the influx of foreign-born citizens into the United States. The number of immigrants allowed to enter America for any given county was limited to three percent of the number of immigrants from that country already living in the United States as defined by the census of 1910. To further restrict immigration, in 1924 Congress adjusted the quota system so it was based on the census of 1890 when few southern Europeans had arrived.

The sensational Sacco and Vanzetti trial in 1921 underscored the anti-foreign attitude of many Americans. Nicola Sacco, a shoe factory worker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fish peddler, were Italian immigrants and known atheists and anarchists. When the two were accused of killing a paymaster and a guard in a daylight robbery of a shoe factory, a notorious trial followed. During the trial, the judge and jury appeared overtly prejudiced against Sacco and Vanzetti because of their immigrant background and their political beliefs.

The trial, and determination of Sacco and Vanzetti’s fate, dragged on for seven years, while protestors around the world organized rallies to show support and demand a new trial for the two doomed men. In the end, both men were executed on August 23, 1927.

As immigrants struggled for fair treatment, a force of evil had reconstituted. A new Ku Klux Klan, one focused against foreigners rather than blacks, was established in 1915 by William J. Simmons, a former preacher. Simmons would allow only native-born white Protestants into his organization, and he referred to America’s melting pot as nothing more than a “garbage can.” Klan membership rapidly grew to a peak of five million members in 1923.

Although the movement’s strongest support was in the Midwest and South, the Klan’s message spoke to individuals in all corners of America. Klan members wore robes, burned crosses, held dogmatic rituals, and organized mass demonstrations to protect its ideal of American life from African American, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and immigrant “corruption.”

In the late 1920s, Americans finally recoiled from the hateful messages the Klan espoused and the violence of their actions. Infighting began to plague the Klan as factions squabbled over control of the large amounts of money collected through a $10 initiation fee. When David C. Stephenson, the leader of the Indiana Klan, was convicted of assault that caused the death of a young woman, many of the remaining supporters deserted the Klan. Finally, a Congressional investigation launched to investigate money-laundering charges, revealed that a large part of initiation fee charged to members was used to pay kickbacks to local organizers to encourage additional recruitment.

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**Religion**

While some Americans were concerned with the increasing immigration into the United States; others feared modernism and new ideas might usurp the authority of the church. For many of the millions of people who lived in rural areas, towns, and small cities around the country, it was not the great urban migration that was a problem, it was that urban culture itself seemed to be wicked, materialistic, and detrimental to moral character.

As Americans abandoned the country in droves and moved to large cities, new ideas emerged among these urban transplants as the influence of modernism was taking hold. More than ever before, education was a priority in Americans’ lives. Many states started to require students to attend school until the age of sixteen or eighteen. A professor from Columbia University, John Dewey, founded the progressive educational movement by promoting the principles of “learning by doing.” Dewey’s idea stated that teachers should educate students on traditional subjects as well as more practical life-skill topics.

Along with the changes in education, Charles Darwin’s theory of biological evolution and Karl Marx’s suggestion that individuals were primarily motivated by economic motives became key points in shaping the progressive mindset. Modernist Christians, who mostly lived in large cities, attempted to connect new scientific advances with religion. They believed that science and religion could not only coexist, each could support the other’s tenants and principles.

It was Darwin’s contribution to Biology that religious fundamentalists despised most. They rejected the theory of evolution and hoped to eliminate all mention of the scientific advances made during the last century regarding the origins of the universe and the history of humankind. Fundamentalists believed that these new ideas minimized the importance of the Bible and contributed to the moral breakdown of young people.

To appease fundamentalists, three southern states, including Tennessee, adopted laws prohibiting the teaching of “any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible.” The American Civil Liberties Union announced that it would finance a challenge to the constitutionality of the law if a teacher would knowingly violate it. Friends convinced John T. Scopes, a well-liked Biology teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, to teach evolution in his classroom, and he was immediately arrested. Lawyers from around the country came forward to defend him, and the stage was set for a sensationalistic event that would put progressive education on trial. The case, often referred to as the “Monkey Trial,” began on July 13, 1925.

The State of Tennessee retained the services of Williams Jennings Bryan to prosecute Scopes. Bryan, a well-known Presbyterian fundamentalist and an accomplished speaker, had helped to popularize the fundamentalist movement. Bryan had begun to campaign against the teaching of evolution as early as 1921. Clarence Darrow, a trial lawyer from Chicago and self-described agnostic, volunteered to defend Scopes.

Reporters from large cities camped in the small Tennessee town reporting on the trial’s spectacle. Spectators drawn by curiosity and publicity seekers captivated by the media-hype also crowded the streets of Dayton. The trial itself did not disappoint the public in terms of drama. Darrow even insinuated that the magnitude of the trial went well beyond the legal issue when he argued, “Scopes isn’t on trial, civilization is on trial … no man’s belief will be safe if they win.”

The judge presiding over the trial ruled that scientific testimony would not be allowed. Faced with this limitation, Darrow decided to try to attack the state’s position, and he asked if Bryan would take the stand as an expert of the Bible. Bryan agreed and what followed was a bitter exchange between Darrow and Bryan that ended in a quick adjournment of the court when the two charged at one another, fists raised. Darrow’s strategy was to point out Bryan’s literal beliefs in the text of the Bible, including that a “great fish” swallowed Jonah, that Eve was created from one of Adam’s ribs, and that Joshua had stopped the movement of the sun. Darrow’s intention was to make Bryan appear irrational; a tactic that many reporters and spectators considered successful.

Ultimately, the court ruled that the real issue was whether or not Scopes taught evolution in his classroom. According to the court, Scopes had purposely violated the law and was fined $100; though the state Supreme Court later overturned the fine on a technicality. Bryan died of a stroke five days after the trial ended, and his death was attributed to the stress of his testimony and the July courtroom heat.

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**Prohibition**

The era of national prohibition began in 1920 with the establishment of the Eighteenth Amendment and was enforced by the Volstead Act passed by Congress that same year. The Act forbade the manufacture and sale of beverages with an alcoholic content greater than .5 percent. Zealous supporters of this law, including many women and parishioners, believed that prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcohol would eliminate the social problems caused by intoxication.

Many Americans began fighting for prohibition long before 1920. Near the beginning of the twentieth century, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League crusaded for legal prohibition. The Anti-Saloon League became a powerful special interest and mobilized Protestant churches to elect candidates that were anti-alcohol. The practice of self-denial that emerged in support of the war effort led many to view alcohol as an unnecessary luxury. The Lever Act of 1917 outlawed the use of grain and other foodstuffs in the production of alcoholic beverages.

By the time Congress enacted a national prohibition, almost 75 percent of Americans lived in counties or states that already prohibited drinking alcohol. The movement, however, faced great resistance in large eastern cities where many social activities were built around the consumption of alcohol. Those who wanted to drink found ingenious ways around the law. Secret and illegal supplies of highly concentrated alcohol sprang up overnight. Citizens began regularly visiting “speakeasies,” secret bars where individuals gathered to socialize.

Americans consumed tremendous amounts of alcohol during prohibition. Women began drinking in record numbers, and youth found it exciting to “bootleg,” or smuggle liquor. Bootlegging became a major business, as many smuggled alcohol into the United States. Others found a new hobby in manufacturing “bathtub gin” and “home brew” for their own personal consumption. Sometimes, drinking highly concentrated homemade concoctions resulted in blindness or death.

Prohibition supplied organized crime with a massive influx of income. Although organized crime had long been a component of the landscape in large cities, mobsters like “Scarface” Al Capone reveled in their increasing power as booze distributors. Capone’s criminal empire, which extended beyond the sale of alcohol to include gambling and prostitution, netted him nearly $60 million in 1927. In Chicago’s gang wars of the 1920’s, mobsters killed about 500 rivals in an effort to control the billion-dollar business of the underworld.

Law enforcement officials were unable, and in many cases unwilling, to stop the endless stream of illegal alcohol. The state and federal agencies charged with enforcing prohibition were understaffed, and many enforcement agents were susceptible to bribery. Many opponents of prohibition believed that the only way to change the law was to break it on a massive scale, so they tried to undermine enforcement efforts so that the law would be seen as meaningless.

In the end, the “noble experiment” of prohibition did not succeed. Few politicians called for an outright appeal of the amendment before 1930; however, leaders recognized the need to at least overhaul the law if it was to be enforced. The prohibition lobby rejected outright all attempts to modify the law, but enforcement of the law remained grossly under funded and understaffed. In 1933, the Eighteenth Amendment upholding national prohibition was repealed by the ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment, which allowed the states to decide for themselves whether or not to support prohibition.

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**New Culture – Part I**

In addition to the political and social transformations brought about by prohibition, fundamentalism and nativism, the 1920s also witnessed a cultural transformation. In this postwar decade, many citizens, especially in larger urban areas, were embracing new forms of entertainment, discovering new recreational activities, and adopting the culture of consumerism. Literature and music were taking adventurous new strides, and the women rights movement was making slow progress. In light of all these events, the writer F. Scott Fitzgerald dubbed this postwar period the “Jazz Age.”

In an era that saw a number of advances for women, the battle for the right to vote finally found closure. In 1918, President Wilson asked Congress to approve a Constitutional amendment to allow women the right to vote, but the Senate failed to pass it by two votes. The National Suffrage Association, led by Carrie Chapman Catt, continued to lobby and petition Congress. On June 4, 1919, the issue went before Congress once again, and this time it passed. The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution was not ratified until August 21, 1920, and by that time the National Suffrage Association had changed its name to the League of Women Voters.

On the labor front, women found more opportunity for work, but the jobs were limited to a few fields such as clerical, teaching, or roles in the service industry. These were jobs that many men considered too “womanly” to actively pursue for themselves. Wages for women typically remained low, especially when compared to the salary of a male performing the same job. In 1920, more than eight million women worked outside the home, and that number increased to well over ten million by the end of the decade.

A drastic alteration in appearance and values helped to distinguish the “new woman” of the 1920s. Known as “flappers,” their look and attitude was characterized by knee-length or higher dresses, rolled down stockings, smoking, ample use of makeup, and even dancing the “Charleston.” The traditionalists, of whom a majority of women still considered themselves, looked down on flappers for what they felt was a disregard for morality. Traditionalists were also alarmed by a rising divorce rate, which was fueled by relaxed divorce laws and a new sense of independence among women. This rate started to decline at the end of the decade due to the Great Depression.

Coinciding with the gains made by women during the 1920s, was a revolution in African American culture. The artistic, political, and literary achievements were due in part to a massive migration of blacks from southern states to northern cities. This move began in 1915 when northern industries were experiencing labor shortages due to the war. In New York City alone the black population more than doubled between the years of 1920 to 1930. Living in the northern states, blacks found they were able to speak out and act more freely, and thus their political and cultural influence started to expand. Jazz music, the creation of black musicians working together in New Orleans in the late nineteenth century, started to gain widespread national popularity. Caucasians and African Americans alike were drawn to jazz’s nontraditional rhythms and melodies.

The musical roots of jazz can be traced to post-Reconstruction traditions, such as spirituals, ragtime, and stringbands. Blending these musical forms with European influences resulted in a distinctive, improvisational sound, which spread across the country as African Americans moved northward. Louis Armstrong, who moved from New Orleans to Chicago to join Joseph Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band in 1922, is praised as one of the fathers of the jazz movement and an extraordinary musical talent. Edward “Duke” Ellington, a significant innovator of early jazz, moved from Washington D.C. to New York City. Ellington started playing at Harlem’s Cotton Club in 1927, during which time his compositions, including large ensembles of twelve to fourteen instruments, foreshadowed the 1930s swing movement.

It was in the same New York City borough where the Cotton Club enjoyed its fame that the African American cultural revolution found its center. The “Harlem Renaissance” gave rise to such figures as Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes. These artists found their voice through the patronage of white Americans who found such creativity inspirational in times when many were becoming increasingly disillusioned.

Garvey was an influential political leader whose platform was based on promoting black expressionism and racial pride, ending imperialism in Africa, and unifying the dispersed black populations. Garvey came to New York from Jamaica in 1916, bringing with him the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), an organization he started two years earlier. The purposes of the UNIA were to help black citizens relocate to Africa (the “Back to Africa Movement”), to sponsor black businesses, and to help fund the Black Star Line Steamship Company. Most of Garvey’s financial endeavors were unsuccessful and ultimately failed, and he was eventually sent to prison in 1925 for defrauding investors. In 1927, President Calvin Coolidge pardoned Garvey and had him deported back to Jamaica.

McKay, one of the first literary standouts during the Harlem Renaissance, published a collection of poems called Harlem Shadows in 1922. Some of McKay’s poem titles included “If We Must Die” and “To the White Fiends.” Langston Hughes, considered to be one of the best poets of the period, described his feelings during his first visit to Harlem by saying “Harlem! I dropped my bags, took a deep breath, and felt happy again.” Hughes published his first compilation in 1926, titled The Weary Blues.

Many African American women also found their voice during the Harlem Renaissance. Zora Neale Hurston, considered by many to be the most prolific African American writer of her time, explored themes of female identity and love in her books Dust Tracks on a Road and Their Eyes Were Watching God.

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**New Culture – Part II**

The literary revival of the 1920s extended well beyond Harlem. In fact, the postwar era seemed to influence many young writers who had become disillusioned by the hopeful optimism before the war, the harsh realities of the war itself, the tactics of the fundamentalist, and Klan brutality. Some of the more prominent American writers became expatriates, while many others were happy to just travel abroad, gathering cultural and life experiences.

Gertrude Stein, an expatriate living in Paris, is credited as being one of the first writers to popularize a modernist writing style starting with her 1906 book Three Lives. Stein also helped to name this new generation of authors when she wrote to Ernest Hemingway saying, “All of you young people who served in the war, you are the lost generation.” The idea of a “lost generation” took hold, and no one typified the epithet more than F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald was an almost overnight success, with his 1920 novel This Side of Paradise, which became very popular with the young flapper culture. Fitzgerald’s second novel, The Great Gatsby (1925), achieved much critical acclaim, but by the end of the decade Fitzgerald’s personal life fell into ruin. He became an alcoholic and his wife was “prone to fits of madness.” Eventually, Fitzgerald moved to Hollywood to find work as a scriptwriter, but he never regained the level of success he enjoyed in the 1920s.

Ernest Hemingway, a WWI veteran, moved away from traditional writing styles and instead developed his own lean, declarative style. The publication of his first two novels, The Sun also Rises (1926) and A Farewell to Arms (1929) marked the beginning of a writing career that would include a Pulitzer Prize for his 1952 novel, The Old Man and the Sea.

The writers of the lost generation also included William Faulkner and T. S. Eliot. Among Faulkner’s contributions to early modernist literature were the harsh war novels Soldier’s Pay (1926), The Sound and the Fury (1929), and As I Lay Dying (1930). The poet T. S. Eliot exemplified the modernist ideal in much of his work. In The Waste Land (1922), Eliot’s disenchantment and sense of helplessness were palpable and his work became a benchmark for modern literature.

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**New Culture – Part III**

Despite all of the turmoil following WWI, including the disillusioned works of the lost generation, America saw great economic prosperity. The 1920s witnessed a spectacular growth in industrial output, business expansion, and consumerism. Helping to sustain this growth, the Federal Reserve Board allowed interest rates to remain low and the Federal government assumed a firm laissez-faire attitude toward business.

Many other factors also contributed to the economic expansion, including the mass production of electricity. More electricity was being generated in America by 1929 than the combined output of the rest of the world. This helped to spur the mass production of automobiles, refrigerators, heavy building equipment, vacuum cleaners, and radios. Between 1921 and 1929, industrial output was doubled, and a finished automobile was rolling off the Ford assembly line in Rouge River Michigan every ten seconds. The Ford Motor Company, founded in 1903, and its Model T automobile greatly contributed to the social and economic impact the car had on the nation. When the Model T was introduced in 1908, its price tag was $850, but by 1924 the car was selling for no more than $290. Frederick Taylor developed a method to standardize the manufacturing process through a step-by-step analysis and factories that applied his methodology were increasing their production.

The mass production of the car was perhaps one of the more important economic advents during the 1920s. No longer a novelty of the wealthy, the efficient assembly line lowered the cost of a car enough that over 30 million were owned in America by 1930. Fast transportation, revenue generating gasoline taxes, and growing dependency on the automobile gave rise to suburb expansion in cities nationwide. The auto industry’s success also drove economic expansion in other areas. It created a need to manufacture more tires, glass, and petroleum products. The proliferation of gas stations soon followed, along with the people needed to staff them, and tourism flourished.

A multitude of willing consumers were also eager to experience other forms of leisure. Heroes such as baseball’s George (“Babe”) Ruth, boxing’s Jack Dempsey, and swimming’s Gertrude Ederle encouraged a growing fan base and huge ticket sales for professional sports. Ederle held eighteen world records by the time she was seventeen, and in 1926 swam the English Channel on her second attempt. The new home entertainment center of the era, the radio, also helped popularize sports. Starting in 1921, radios began appearing throughout American homes, even though long-ranged broadcasting was not viable until late in the decade.

Motion pictures, mostly a novelty until WWI, found a purpose in war propaganda with the “Hang the Kaiser” films. Earlier films, including 1903’s The Great Train Robbery, were shown in five-cent theaters, known as “nickelodeons.” In the 1920s, movies began to show their true potential, reflecting the social climate, adapting to new technologies, and giving rise to a shared experience nation-wide. Unlike radio broadcasts that varied from region to region, people going to “picture palaces” to watch movies saw the same show. The first “talkie,” The Jazz Singer, was released to a delighted public in 1927, marking the end of silent films.

The popularity of the film was also attracting the nation’s attention to another novelty—the movie star. At many times more recognizable than the nation’s leaders, top movie stars were popular enough to demand salaries that eclipsed the salary of the President of the United States. Stars such as Rudolph Valentino and Clara Bow began to wow audiences. Valentino, one of the first film idols and considered to be consummate “Latin lover”, captured the attention of millions with his silent films The Sheik and The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Bow, one of the first sex symbols of the movies, attracted the flapper filled audiences in mass. Her films such as Mantrap and It demonstrated her depth and range, and inspired many young to emulate her.

Film production was soon big business, and during the 1920s it was under the control of a few large companies. Production, distribution, and advertising were all business aspects that were handled internally by companies such as Paramount, MGM, and Warner Brothers. Mostly, the headquarters of each of these media giants was in New York City, but the actual filming process was taking place in Hollywood-taking advantage of the warm, sunny southern California climate. The rise of Hollywood signaled the beginning of a new industry that continues to influence American culture and imagination to this day. www.hippocampus.org

**America’s Economy Roars**

At the close of World War I, the United States found itself in a recession. Millions of veterans were suddenly looking for jobs at a time when industry was reeling from the cancellation of billions of dollars in war contracts. In addition, shortages of consumer goods that were not produced during the war created high prices and inflation. The cost of living doubled from 1913 to 1920, causing great distress for many Americans.

Still in shock from the horrors of fighting a modern war, Americans had little patience for economic problems. They wanted to put the war and all hardship behind them as soon as possible. Americans felt a booming business sector was the road to recovery from the recession. Anything that appeared to hamper business seemed unpatriotic and counterproductive. Union activity and strikes were viewed as socialist plots to harm the American economy and were dealt with harshly. Americans had been horrified at the way a handful of radicals had been able to overthrow the government of Russia, and people feared that under the right conditions communists might be able to succeed on this side of the globe. In this political environment, unions were unable to negotiate effectively, and they lost a third of their membership during the 1920s.

In post-war America, the progressive reforms of the early twentieth century were viewed as being too burdensome on the economy. The reform effort was redirected toward improved transportation, education, and public services. The old-time progressive reformers had hoped that government intervention on behalf of labor during World War I would continue into peacetime, but the War Industries Board was dissolved soon after the Armistice, and federal controls on the economy were discontinued.

In the elections of the 1920s, voters rejected progressive Democratic candidates in favor of a succession of Republican presidents who embraced laissez-faire politics. In addition to giving a free hand to business, Americans had been so appalled by the carnage and senselessness of an all-out war on foreign soil that they believed the best policy for the U.S. was to return to the "no foreign entanglements" approach of Washington and Jefferson. The federal government in the 1920s adopted isolationist policies with regard to world affairs, especially those outside the Western Hemisphere. In addition, it slowly reduced interventionism in Central America and the Caribbean. To ensure economic isolation, high tariffs were instituted. Truly believing that World War I was the "war to end all wars," America allowed its military to lapse into decay.

Business interests were given special consideration by all institutions of government including Congress and the Supreme Court. For several reasons, laissez-faire appeared to work phenomenally well in the 1920s. Capital that had been hoarded in the private sector because of the uncertainties of war was now made available just as the tax policies were changed to favor investment. The Federal Reserve Board kept interest rates low, which further stimulated capital formation for large business enterprises.

Advances in technology also contributed to a growing business sector. Mechanized transportation could now be powered by engines that burned petroleum fuels, and large domestic oil fields were discovered making these fuels relatively inexpensive. Assembly line and mass production techniques were perfected producing cars, trucks, tractors, and all sorts of home and industrial appliances. Electric power plants provided clean power to homes and factories at a reasonable cost. To the nineteenth century innovations of interchangeable parts and breaking down complex operations into simple steps, the twentieth century added standardization and the time-and-motion analyses pioneered by Frederick W. Taylor to make the assembly line highly efficient. Union officials were alarmed that workers were becoming nothing but adjuncts to the machines, but increased production was its own justification for the science of factory management.

With the new chemical fertilizers and modern refinements in the factories, the productivity of both farms and industry increased. The problem became how to find markets for all of this new production. Businesses sought the professionals of advertising to persuade people to purchase more goods, and the economy turned from production oriented to consumer oriented. Banks readily made loans and stores extended credit in order to increase sales and entice consumers to buy goods that would be beyond their reach but for the option of paying in installments. Automobile ownership conferred on Americans a new mobility and freedom, but a car usually required a loan. Reluctance to go into debt softened, and by 1929 America owned more cars than all the rest of the world combined. America also produced the lion's share of electricity and held 40 percent of the world's wealth. Living a little beyond one's means was considered not merely harmless, but actually beneficial to the economy. As time went on, however, many Americans found themselves mired in credit debt as they tried to live the good life before they could afford it.

The major goal of government in the 1920s was to help business and industry operate with maximum efficiency, and it appeared to do this admirably well. With the stakes so high and opportunities everywhere, an incentive grew to circumvent government restrictions for the purpose of profit. Corruption in government became common through officials taking bribes from profiteers or using insider information and power to profit for themselves. Malfeasance occurred at all levels, but a series of scandals rocked the decade of the twenties as officials in the highest echelons of government were caught with their fingers in the till. These events fostered a sense of skepticism with regard to government and authority figures. Everyone appeared to be on the take, and the honest American who lived within his or her income seemed like a dullard not in step with the times.

Though businesses and corporations were generally—and sometimes spectacularly—successful, the economic base of the country was not strengthened in the 1920s. Families supported by farming and wage-labor continued to be in the majority, but farm and labor income, which had for decades been dropping relative to middle- and upper-class incomes, did not rise even in the economic heyday of the twenties. This slowly eroded the purchasing base of America, contributing to an economy that eventually could no longer sustain itself; and the United States, along with the rest of the world, slid inexorably into depression.

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**President Warren G. Harding – Part I**

The 1920s were dominated by the administrations of three Republican presidents: Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. Elected in 1920 on a "return to normalcy" platform, Warren G. Harding was a hearty, kind, easy-going man—too kind and easy-going to be a good president. He found it difficult to refuse any requests his friends made of him. In addition, Harding was less gifted intellectually than a president ought to be. He admitted this weakness when he said, "I am a man of limited talents from a small town." To compensate, Harding attempted to surround himself with men of first-rate minds, and he delegated much responsibility to them. Harding was successful in his appointments of Charles Evans Hughes as secretary of state, Andrew W. Mellon as secretary of treasury, and Herbert Hoover as secretary of commerce. But a host of other schemers and political boondogglers, including Secretary of Interior Albert B. Fall and Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty, manipulated and used Harding to advance their selfish purposes. Harding's limitations made him unable to detect their deceitfulness or to protect the nation from these self-serving predators.

In the most hurtful scandal of Harding's presidency, Secretary of Interior Albert Fall in 1921 persuaded Secretary of the Navy Edwin Denby to allow oil magnates Harry F. Sinclair and Edward L. Doheny to lease Teapot Dome in Wyoming and Elk Hills in California, in spite of the fact that these valuable oil fields had been set aside by Congress for the use of the Navy. Without fully understanding the documents presented to him, Harding signed over the leases. It was later discovered that Fall had taken a $100,000 bribe from Doheny and a $300,000 bribe from Sinclair to push this transaction through. Not until 1927 was the Supreme Court able to revoke the Elk Hills and Teapot Dome leases and return these reserves to the Navy.

Attorney General Harry Daugherty, part of the crooked "Ohio Gang" (Harding's poker cronies), failed to prosecute criminals in a consistent manner, giving special consideration to some who gave him "considerations." He was accused of selling pardons and liquor permits for his own remuneration. Daugherty went to trial in 1927, but not before making untruthful implications concerning the integrity of Harding, who by then was dead and could not defend himself.

In the Forbes scandal, Colonel Charles R. Forbes of the Army, appointed by Harding as head of the Veterans Bureau, was caught along with others skimming from appropriations earmarked for construction of veterans' hospitals. It is estimated that this group stole $200 million from the taxpayers. Forbes spent two years in a federal penitentiary for his crimes. Disgusted by these scandals, Americans became increasingly cynical about politics and politicians.

Though progressive Democrats would have liked the railroads and the Merchant Marine to be permanently nationalized following the war, Harding's Republican administration did not believe in the government running businesses in peacetime. In 1920, the railroads and Merchant Marine were both privatized, though each had its own trouble operating in the free market without government support.

The Esch-Cummins Transportation Act provided for consolidation of rail lines under private ownership and ensured that the railroads would remain solvent with the assistance of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Automobiles, trucks, and new airplanes had begun to take away some of the railroads' freight and passenger transportation business. Where the government's role had before been to prevent the railroads from taking advantage of their customers, it was now a matter of keeping the rail lines alive as an essential national service. To that end, the Railway Labor Board forced a 12 percent wage cut on railroad workers. This move precipitated a two-month strike that was summarily quashed by the government.

Likewise, the Merchant Marine Act of 1920 allowed the government to divest itself of most of its 1,500 war-built cargo ships at auction. American shipping found, however, that it could not compete with foreign shippers who employed seamen at subsistence wages.

In the less than three years of his administration, Harding appointed four Supreme Court justices. Three were so ultra-conservative that they stifled innovation and reform for 20 years. The fourth, former president William Howard Taft, who was appointed chief justice, served admirably in this capacity, pursuing a course of sense and flexibility. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court of the 1920s was unsympathetic to labor, resisted government involvement in the economy, and overturned progressive legislation that had been passed earlier, including child labor legislation. In Adkins v. Children's Hospital (1923) the Supreme Court reversed its earlier ruling in Muller v. Oregon that had given women special protection in the workplace and guaranteed them a minimum wage. The argument was that since women now had the right to vote and were to be treated as equals in the eyes of the law, they should therefore not receive special privileges that were not accorded to men.

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**President Warren G. Harding – Part II**

In accord with the new atmosphere of government partnership with business, antitrust laws were not enforced and many government agencies such as the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Federal Reserve Board were more sympathetic to the businesses they were monitoring than to the public they were supposed to be protecting. Companies in the same business were allowed to be in collusion in fixing wages, prices, and policies with regard to the government and other industries. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover believed that the cutthroat competition of the Gilded Age had been wasteful and that voluntary cooperation combined with self-regulation was a more efficient policy for business than a repressive and intrusive government. When all parties participated in an open and constructive manner, this hands-off method was ideal. But crooked dealers found self-policing to be a program made to order for fleecing the public.

To its credit, the Republican Congress in 1921 created the Bureau of the Budget, which for the first time provided the government with an accurate accounting of its income and expenditures and over the years proved to be a valuable tool for assessing past performance and planning government programs and appropriations. In addition, Secretary of Treasury Andrew Mellon introduced more efficient practice into government and crafted a set of tax laws that reduced taxes on individuals and business. During World War I, the national debt had climbed from about $2 billion to $24 billion in spite of a tax rate of as high as 66 percent. Mellon argued that lower taxes would free capital to be invested in production, which would eventually return a greater volume of tax revenue to the government due to an expanded economy. His theory was later echoed by the British economist John Maynard Keynes.

Mellon's policies carried through the 1920s and indeed the deficit was reduced to $16 billion. Most of the tax reductions went to the wealthy, however. Mellon defended this policy by saying that it is more beneficial to the general welfare if the rich have more capital to invest in large projects, than if individuals have more money in their pockets. Critics have claimed that by lowering taxes, excess cash became available for speculation on the stock market, thus contributing to the crash of 1929.

Having rejected the Treaty of Versailles, Congress in 1921 issued a unilateral resolution that officially declared America's involvement in the war over. Harding and Senate Republicans would also have liked to reject the League of Nations, but could not justify completely abandoning the United State's presence in this international body. As a compromise, the U.S. sent unofficial observers to Geneva, Switzerland, to keep tabs on the League's activities.

Harding could not hide in an isolationist shell with regard to Middle East oil, either. Oil had been critical to the Allies' victory, and it was clear that access to oil was pivotal for a nation to be powerful in the world. Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes vied successfully with Great Britain for oil-drilling concessions in the region.

Disarmament was another issue that had to be confronted. A potentially bank-breaking, three-way race among Britain, Japan, and America for dominance on the high seas had been shaping up since the end of World War I. Though it appeared America could win on the strength of its mammoth production capacity, Americans and the rest of the world were concerned by the cost as well by the heightened potential for armed conflict with the oceans full of super-navies.

At the Disarmament Conference of 1921-1922 in Washington, Secretary Hughes proposed dramatic restrictions on new shipbuilding and parity among Britain, America, and Japan in battleships and aircraft carriers in a ratio of 5:5:3. To agree to this smaller portion, Japan demanded that Britain and America not fortify their possessions in the Far East, including in the Philippines, and that all the nations with a colonial presence in the Pacific refrain from increasing their holdings. The Five-Power Naval Treaty of 1922, signed by the United States, Great Britain, France, Japan, and Italy, articulated these provisions.

In a similar vein, the Americans, British, French, and Japanese signed the Four-Power Treaty agreeing to respect each others' possessions in the Pacific, while the Nine-Power Treaty reaffirmed the Open Door Policy with regard to China, ostensibly guaranteeing that troubled country's independence. Though the Disarmament Conference was considered a diplomatic victory for world peace, the concessions made to Japan cleared the way for that country's aggression in China, Southeast Asia, and ultimately the Philippines. In addition, countries were free to build fleets of smaller cruisers, destroyers, and submarines, which many did while isolationist America allowed its fleet to dwindle as aging ships were scrapped and no new ships were built.

In response to business pressure to keep cheap European manufactured goods off the American market, Congress in 1922 passed the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Law increasing duties on foreign imports from an average of 27 percent to 38.5 percent. Though this protected some American manufacturers, it forced American consumers to pay higher prices than they might have if there had been a free world market. Perhaps more destructive for the time, however, was that in order to recover economically, Europe needed to be able to sell its manufactured goods in American markets. With high tariffs, Europeans were unable to compete in America and their economies floundered. The Germans were unable to meet their reparations payments to the French and British, who were depending on that money to pay their American war debts. European defaults then put strains on the American financial system, and bad feeling ensued on both sides of the Atlantic. The Europeans retaliated by erecting their own trade barriers to American products. As a result of the high tariffs, Europe's prolonged economic distress fostered political dissonance that allowed the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy.

To his credit, Harding spoke out against the Ku Klux Klan and other organizations of hatred and violence. He was also a staunch supporter of women's rights. Overwhelmed by the demands of the presidency and just beginning to realize the extent of corruption running through his administration, Harding was encouraged by friends to get away from the pressures of Washington by going on a speaking tour to Alaska and the West. He collapsed in Seattle in August of 1923 and died shortly afterward in a San Francisco hospital of a blood clot and pneumonia. Millions of Americans sincerely mourned Harding's death and lined the tracks to pay their last respects as his funeral train steamed somberly across the nation. Many historians speculate that distress over the breaking scandals throughout his administration contributed to Harding's passing.

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**President Calvin Coolidge**

As Harding's vice president, Calvin Coolidge took office for the final year of Harding's presidency. He then ran for president the next year. The election of 1924 was characterized by deep fragmentation of the Democratic Party over such issues as prohibition, progressivism, north/south sectionalism, urban/rural disaffection, and immigration. The Democratic convention chose John W. Davis, a conservative Democrat, to counter Coolidge, but the liberals decamped to field their own candidate, Wisconsin Senator Robert M. La Follete, under a New Progressive Party banner. With the Democratic Party divided, Coolidge made a clean sweep into the White House.

A no-nonsense New Englander, Coolidge believed "the business of America is business," and the sharks of industry forged ahead unrestrained in their ambitions, their production, and sometimes in their damage. Reserved, cautious, frugal, and intolerant of moral laxity, Coolidge quickly discouraged the "good ole boy" politicking that had led to scandal in Harding's administration.

Coolidge's fragile state of health undoubtedly influenced his presidency. He has been characterized as the least active president in history, taking daily afternoon naps and proposing no new legislation. Coolidge inherited issues he had to make decisions on, however. One issue was pressure from veterans to be repaid for wages they had lost while they were in the service. The main organization for lobbying for benefits was the American Legion, which had been organized by Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. in Paris in 1919. The Legion was a patriotic, extremely conservative group that could call up a large number of votes nationwide and was thus able to influence elections. Veterans pressured Congress into passing a "bonus" bill in 1922. Harding vetoed it, but Congress was again prevailed upon and passed the Adjusted Compensation Act in 1924. This act gave each veteran a paid-up insurance policy with a 20-year maturity date. The projected cost of the plan was $3.5 billion—a hefty sum for the time. Coolidge also vetoed the bill, but Congress overrode his veto in its fear of veteran voter backlash.

While American industry surged ahead in the 1920s, the American farmer did not do so well. During the war, farm products were in high demand with foreign farms out of commission due to fighting. After the war, Europeans began farming again. Meanwhile, American farmers had bought into the promise of technology with mechanical tractors to pull plows and other farm machinery. A farmer could now plant and harvest far more acres than before and eliminate costly animal and human labor. Food surpluses began to appear, which drove prices below the level of cost for the farmer. As many as 25 percent had their farms foreclosed.

Farmers organized into a farm bloc that successfully lobbied government to pass legislation such as the Capper-Volstead Act that exempted agricultural cooperatives from antitrust laws. But Coolidge consistently vetoed a plan for government to buy surpluses and sell them overseas in order to keep American prices high. The distress in the farming sector in the midst of such apparent prosperity is one indicator of the unbalanced economy that persisted during the 1920s.

Americans at this time indulged themselves with pacifist fantasies, and two million signed a petition to outlaw war. Though skeptical of its actual utility, Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg took the petition to France and used it as a basis for the Pact of Paris, which was eventually signed by 62 countries. Kellogg won a Nobel Peace prize for this diplomatic feat. Unfortunately, outlawing war was a concept limited to the imagination, since aggressive nations took no heed of mere words on paper. So long as it was in their best interests to appear to abide by the pact, aggressive nations could "frame" their victim nations into armed conflict and claim innocence. Germany would eventually use this tactic to send its troops, dressed in Polish military uniforms, to attack a German radio station. On the basis of this ruse, Germany invaded and overran Poland.

In a twist of irony, American pacifism included keeping foreign powers from fishing in the politically muddy waters of Central America and the Caribbean by forcefully maintaining peace in times of governmental instability. To that end, America stationed troops in Haiti (1914 to 1934), Nicaragua (1909 to 1933), and the Dominican Republic (1916 to 1924). Coolidge ordered the troops out of Nicaragua in 1925, but was forced to send an army of 5,000 back in 1926. Regardless of American good intentions, these interventions bred resentment in the region.

In 1926, Mexico moved to nationalize its oil industry. American oil companies, which had invested heavily in development of Mexican oil resources, pressured Coolidge to use military force to return their property. Coolidge declined to attempt a military solution and instead negotiated an agreement, which measurably improved relations with Mexico.

Coolidge oversaw a partial withdrawal of U.S. troops from the region and is remembered as the pioneer of the "Good Neighbor" policy with Latin America and the Caribbean nations. Even so, isolationism precluded the U.S. from doing what it might have to assist in the economic development of our southern neighbors, a situation that fostered envy and resentment and ultimately bred regimes hostile to the United States.

Foreign policy in the 1920s staggered under the burden of the foreign debt as America tried to squeeze the $10 billion owed to the Treasury from war-impoverished Britain and France. These countries then had no option but to pressure Germany, which was in even worse economic shape, to pay the $33 billion in reparations demanded in the Treaty of Versailles. Germany could not begin to keep up with its repayment schedule, but in 1923 France sent troops into the Ruhr Valley to force the issue. Germany responded by running the printing presses and allowing the German mark to inflate to an astounding one trillionth of its prewar value. Germany then tried to pay its debts with worthless paper, but runaway inflation proved catastrophic to German economic recovery and led to deep political unrest that fostered radicalism and fascism in the 1930s.

To attempt to pay their debts and finance recovery, Europeans borrowed heavily from American banks and other private sources, increasing the European debt burden to Americans. To repay these debts, they needed to be able to sell their goods in the vast American marketplace. But with American tariffs climbing ever higher, Europeans found themselves shut out of this avenue to recovery and were understandably resentful.

Many diplomats and political analysts of the time believed that the war debts and reparations should have been reduced or canceled, but those to whom the debts were owed did not want to lose hope of retrieving these payments. The Dawes Plan of 1924 streamlined the loan reparation/repayment revolving flow of money between Europe and America by reducing Germany's reparations and expanding American credit to Germany through government guaranteed loans. This scheme might have ultimately been successful except for the worldwide depression of the thirties. The last round of payments was made in 1933. In the final analysis, Germany paid to England and France what the Americans lent it, and England and France paid to America what Germany paid in reparations. Middlemen may have made money along the way, but the American economy still had to absorb the $10 billion loss as a cost of war.

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**President Herbert Hoover**

Calvin Coolidge declined to run in the 1928 presidential election, paving the way for Herbert Hoover who had ably run the Department of Commerce under both Coolidge and Harding. Hoover was educated as a mine engineer and had become a wealthy and successful businessman on his own merits before being appointed to Harding's cabinet. He had been brought up as a Quaker and espoused a practice of business and government that he called "associationalism," a term that might be translated as individual initiative within a cooperative framework. This approach served him well in his business enterprises, when he served as head of the Food Administration for Belgian relief in World War I, and as secretary of commerce under Harding and Coolidge. He had never been elected to office, however, and found the ever-present campaign mudslinging by those in both parties to be a painful experience.

His opponent, Al Smith, was a Catholic and a Tammany Hall Democrat from New York City who believed in ending prohibition. The country was not yet ready to give up the "noble experiment" of outlawing alcohol, however. In addition, America was prejudiced against the idea of a non-Protestant president. Many people also felt that a person born and bred in the quintessential urban environment of New York could not have either sympathy or understanding for those living in other circumstances.

The election of 1928 was the first to combine old-time whistle stop campaigning with addresses to the electorate over the new-fangled radio. Although he was not a powerful orator, Hoover's plain speech and solid mid-western accent transmitted a sense of sincerity across the radio waves, while Smith's more flamboyant expressions and downtown twang did not come across well. Besides, the great prosperity machine was still running at full speed. Voters showed their approval of conservative government by voting in Hoover by a landslide as well as installing an overwhelmingly Republican Congress.

Except for the debt-riddled farming sector, the economy seemed strong when Hoover took office. For the farmers, Hoover sponsored the Agricultural Marketing Act to help establish cooperatives, and he created the Federal Farm Board with a half billion dollar budget to buy up and stockpile grain and cotton surpluses in order to support farm prices. But farmers desperately produced faster than the government could buy and quickly overran the half-billion dollar stopgap, only to see prices plunge lower than before.

Profitable new industries seemed to make up for struggling old ones, and stock prices rose far above the actual worth of the companies they represented. These high prices were fueled by such levels of borrowing and speculation that the government became worried. Hoover tried unsuccessfully to slow speculation through the Federal Reserve Board, but it was too little too late, and the speculation bubble burst in October 1929 as a first harbinger of the long drop to the bottom of the Great Depression.

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